

**János Sipos<sup>1</sup>**  
***Kyrgyz Folksongs – a new book and an e-book***

The various Turkic groups evolved along diverse processes of Turkification. Various ethnic layers are superimposed and are by now thoroughly interfused, but along a few dimensions such as music they can still be differentiated in some regards. The old Samoyedic, Ugric, Kettic and other elements of Turkic tongues also raise the question to what extent the original strata deemed Turkic were themselves Turkified. (Sinor 1979-80: 768-773)

Though to different degrees, there are common layers in Turkic groups, e.g. Kipchak elements in the Karachay-Malkar, Nogay, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Bashkir and other groups. Of course, these common elements were not homogeneous in most cases, and the substratum of each group always played an important role. (Sultanov 1982: 7-8.)

The Turks Turkified nearly every area they occupied for lengthy periods of time and in great numbers. What is more, in Central Asia, in the Azeri areas and in Anatolia they even Turkified the local population outnumbering them. An important factor contributing to the success of Turkification was certainly the lack of force. In that period it was irrelevant to have a common official language; the Turkic ruling elite often used Persian in state administration or in literature, and the language of the Islam was Arabic. Nor should it be forgotten that for nearly a thousand years before the Turkic groups, the Eurasian steppe was dominated by Iranian-speaking nomads, masses of whom were most probably absorbed by the Turks.

My research focuses on ethnic groups of various Turkic tongues, but it avoids being monotonous since the musics of these groups can largely differ, and their musics are differently interrelated than their languages. The research of the Turkic-tongued area thus

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. János Sipos ([www.zti.hu/sipos](http://www.zti.hu/sipos), academia.edu) is \* Senior researcher of the Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, \* Member of the Hungarian Academy of Art, \* Lecturer at the Folk Music Department of the Franz Liszt Music Academy, Budapest, \* Hungarian representative of *International Council of Traditional Music* (ICTM) and \* Founding member of the „Music of the Turkic speaking peoples” ICTM study group. From 1987 he has been spending some 100 months in areas inhabited by different Turkic people and collected more than 10.000 songs in Anatolia, Thrace (1999-2003), Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, among Karachays in the Caucasus Mountains and in Turkey and among American Indians. Based on his field work he has published 16 books, 8 in English, 6 in Hungarian, 1 in Turkish and 1 in Azeri language. His research was helped by different funds like Fulbright Visiting Scholarship (USA), Andrew V. Mellon Post-Doctoral Fellowships (USA, 5 times), Tokyo Foundation - Joint Research Program (Japan); British Academy: Arnold-Stein Exploration Foundation (7 times); Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (many times) etc.

sheds light on a complex musical world, offering conclusion that may have relevance to the interpretation of the Hungarian and some other folk music.

Research into the musics of eastern ethnicities authenticated by on location collecting work has great traditions in Hungary, suffice it to mention Béla Bartók's Anatolian and László Vikár's Cheremiss, Chuvash, Tatar and Bashkir researches. I have also joined this strain of research with my Anatolian, Caucasian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Azeri, North Caucasian Karachay-Malkar and Turkmen expeditions and publications over the past 28 years. At the beginning, this work concentrated on the exploration of the eastern elements in Hungarian folk music but it soon became areal through the study of the folk music of the multi-ethnic Volga-Kama region.

Before long, my researches got enlarged into a comparative ethnomusicological analysis of a vast Turkic-speaking territory. On the music of these peoples I wrote several books, among them the *Kyrgyz Folksongs* published in 2014 in Budapest by the l'Harmattan Publishing House in paper and e-book form as well (see [www.zti.hu/sipos](http://www.zti.hu/sipos)).

The book *Kyrgyz Folksongs* is to be read in view of this broader frame. On the other hand, the exploration of Kyrgyz music has a value of its own, as there are very few analytic and comparative publications highlighting this music.

The material of the book is chiefly the result of my collecting efforts: the songs were recorded, notated and analyzed by me. My fieldwork in Isık-Köl, Narın and Bişkek in 2002 was followed by researches around At-Başı and in Talas county in 2004. I have read the accessible publications, and also transcribed and examined other researcher's collections containing tunes from the southwestern areas. Finally I seemed to have enough reliable material of Kyrgyz vocal folk music to write the book *Kyrgyz Folksongs*.

Experiencing the speed of the disappearance of Kyrgyz folk music, I think it was the highest time to complete this research. Just like in many other parts of the world, in Kyrgyz villages and towns one encounters the destructive impacts of the present day media society upon authentic folklore, aggravated here by the effects of the Soviet empire. Except for laments, in Kyrgyzstan old tunes are only known by people above 65-70, and it often takes great patience and painstaking work to excavate them from their memory. In a few decades' time this generation will die out and with them even the memory of the old strata of Kyrgyz folk music will vanish. Actually, we can only collect relics of this musical culture today, too.

*Chapter 1* is a brief introduction to Kyrgyzstan, followed by the main factors of the Kyrgyz ethnogenesis and the main views concerning it. I touch on the Hungarian researchers'

earlier Kyrgyz investigations and give a colourful account of my own Kyrgyz folk music collecting trips.

*Chapter 2* acquaints the reader with Hungarian ethnomusicology's tradition in researching Finno-Ugric and Turkic folk music. I list here the main old Hungarian folk music styles and examine their possible Turkic, and specifically Kyrgyz connections.

*Chapter 3* begins with a review of the earlier Kyrgyz folk music publications, followed by the description of the musical features of Kyrgyz folksongs. Here the genres, formal features of tunes, the rhythmic and tonal bases of Kyrgyz folk music are outlined. I touch on the Kyrgyz instruments, instrumental music, Kyrgyz epic works and the musical foundations of epic songs and speak a little bit more detailed about the famous Kyrgyz akın *Toktogul*.

*Chapter 4* contains the classification of Kyrgyz songs. This is the most difficult chapter to read but it includes the largest amount of novel information. The aim is to introduce the Kyrgyz folksong types, groups, classes and styles. A total of 94 representative songs are given to illustrate the tune groups, so the reader who attentively studies and hopefully learns the melodies will have a good insight into the world of Kyrgyz folksongs.

This chapter will be usefull in education and also in creating national based modern Kyrgyz music. Also usefull for those ethnomusicologists who prefere methods of the social or cultural anthropology but also examine the musical forms as well.

*Chapter 5* is an anthology of 332 folksongs, providing an interpretive background to the tune groups described in the previous chapter. At present, it is the largest Kyrgyz folksong collection in print.

*Chapter 6* contains the Kyrgyz song texts and their English translation. Here I call your attention to the fact that such quantity of Kyrgyz song texts and their English translation has never been published before.

*Chapter 7* offers a comparison of the folk songs of the Anatolian Turks, Azeris, Turkmens, Karachay-Malkars, Tatars, Bashkirs, Chuvashs and Kazakhs from a bird's-eye-view.

*Chapter 8* contains maps and detailed indices of the places of collection, singers, genres, song texts, musical forms, tonal ranges, cadences, scales and rhythmic formulae. The book ends with a rich bibliography.



*Kyrgyz aksakals*

Now let us turn to the introduction of some important Kyrgyz folksong types. As a result of the analysis the Kyrgyz tunes were arranged into five blocks of different size and significance.<sup>2</sup> Among these blocks I show a few examples of the twin-bar tunes and the laments.

The main types of the Kyrgyz *twin-bar tunes* are: a) tunes skipping on the G,-C bichord, b) tunes rotating around the middle note of trichords, c) tunes of descending or hill-shaped first lines, and e) tunes with a down leap at the end of the lines.

Let us see two realizations of type b).

---

<sup>2</sup> The tunes are arranged in five blocks of different size and significance: 1a) Twin-bar tunes: tunes skipping on the G,-C bichord, tunes rotating around the middle note of trichords, the bekbekey group and Phrygian tunes, tunes of descending or hill-shaped first lines, and tunes with a down leap at the end of the lines; 2) Tunes of major character: one- and two-lined laments and related tunes; two-lined tunes with (5), (6), (7) and (8) main cadences and their four-lined kin, as well as „real“ four-lined melodies; 3) Tunes of minor character: one- and two-lined laments and their relatives; tunes with (4) and (5) main cadences, four-lined tunes, and tunes with valley-shaped, ascending or undulating first lines; 4) Caramazan tunes: forms containing the major and minor third, and 5) Tunes of domed structure.

The most frequent rotation occurs on the notes of the D-B-C trichord. This kernel is frequent in the recitation of the *Manas* epic; and in general it is one of the main motifs of Kyrgyz folk music (ex.1a).

Though with a smaller weight, this motif can be found in the music of other Turkic peoples, too, e.g. in the Kazakh *terme* tunes. The lines spinning on the D-B-C core often end with a line descending on the E-D-G, or D-B-G, trichord (ex.1b)

a)  $\text{♩} = 184$

Bo - zor - gon too - nun boo - ru - nan  
Bo - zor - tup üñ - kür men kaz - dim.  
Ka - kıl - da - gan oy ce - ñe  
Kay ce - ri - men men caz - ñim?

b)  $\text{♩} = 112$

Ba - şım - da - gı bar - caz - dık  
To - tu bir - kuş - tun cü - nli e - ken.  
Al - ga - nım ke - tip as - ker - ge  
Al - da - nın ga - na kay - sı ay tı - nı e - ken.

Example 1 Twin-bar tunes based on rotating motifs<sup>3</sup>

*Laments* constitute an ancient and important layer of folk musics, being perhaps the most resistant genre to time. The first group of the second block of Kyrgyz tunes contains laments and structurally more or less related tunes whose genres such as the *kız uzatuu* „bride’s farewell“ belong here without doubt. Some other tunes having different genres are arranged here, if they have two descending or hill-shaped lines moving under the other, cadencing on neighboring notes, and are performed in a free and improvisatory manner.

The two-core form of Kyrgyz laments is characterized by descending or ascending-descending lengthier lines performed mostly *parlando-rubato* and cadencing on D or C. The melodies or the lamenting processes usually ends on C, exceptionally on D (ex.2a,b). All this compares the Kyrgyz laments quite closely to the Anatolian, Azeri or, for that matter, to the Hungarian laments, although the more markedly hill-shape sections lends the Kyrgyz laments a somewhat different character.

<sup>3</sup> ex.2a, *Song of the sister-in-law*, Sulaymanov Turdugul (1929), Sarıbağış, Kara-Buluñ, 2004; ex.2b, *Song to her husband going to war*, Asanova Alisa (1929, Birlik), Moñoldor, At-Başı, 2004

a) *Parlando* ♩ = 160

b) *Parlando* ♩ = 104

Example 2 Two-lined laments of major character and their relatives<sup>4</sup>

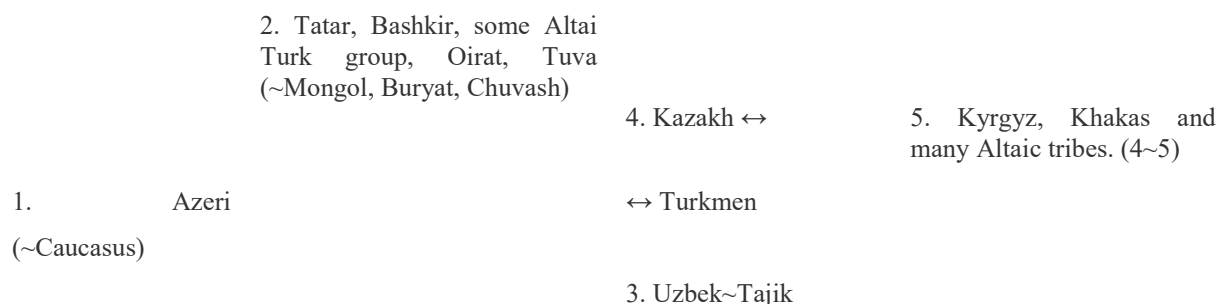
There is also a large group of Kyrgyz folksongs where the tunes display kinship with the above outlined two-core laments by virtue of their melodic line, main cadences and free improvisatory performing character.

Viktor Sergeevich Vinogradov (1958), a specialist of Kyrgyz music charted a summary of the Inner Asian Turkic folk music. The map shows important musical connections but it should be taken into account that he considered professional, semi-professional and rural folksongs alike. That may underlie the startling fact that Kazakhs and Turkmens are in the same group.

Let us see now his map of the music of some Turkic speaking people, modified by me. The map enables us to find the place of the Kyrgyz folk music among the folk music of other Turkic peoples.

Group 1 contains the Azeris closely tied to Caucasian traditions. Group 2 includes the northern groups: Tatars, Bashkirs, some Altay Turks, Oirats, Tuvans, whose music is closely linked to the musical practice of Mongols, Buryats and Chuvash people. Group 3 contains the Uzbeks with their Tajik relations. Group 4 involves the Kazakhs and Turkmens, while the last, 5<sup>th</sup> group contains the Kyrgyz, Khakas and several Altaic tribes. For their common nomadic background groups 4 and 5 display several common features. Anatolia is a special with its complex diatonic music.

<sup>4</sup> ex.14a, *Lament*, İmanaliyeva Kalıy (1929), Kuşçu, Aral, 2004; ex.14b, *Farewell to the bride*, Atıkanova Masılkan (1936, Miñ-Bulak), Saruu, Köpüröbazar, 2004



Map 1. A map of Turkic folk musics

It is perhaps Gippius (1964) who summed up the current stage of such typologies most precisely: „It is still a matter of the future to have a historical dissertation that carries out the comparative examination of the national musics of Tuvans, the Turkic peoples living in the areas of the Altay, the Ural, the Volga area and their relations in Central Asia, as well as the Mongols and Buryats. At present there are not enough publications for this research in the literature of Soviets or other peoples.“ (see also Slobin 1969a: xiii)

Finally once again I draw the attention of my ethnomusicologist colleagues to the importance of the coordinated and comparative research of the folk music of the Turkic peoples.

## References

- Abramson, S. M. (1990), *Kirgizy i ich etnogeneticheskie i istoriko-kul'turnye svyazi*, Frunze: Izdatyel'stvo "Kyrgyzstan".
- Beliaev, V. M. (1939), *Kirgizskaia narodnaia muzyka, Sovetskaia muzyka*, №6.
- Beliaev, V. M. (1952), *Toktogul Satylganov i kirgizskie akyny*. Moscow-Leningrad, 1952.
- Beliaev, V. M. (1954), *Kirgizskaia SSR, Seriya Muzykal'naia kul'tura soiuznykh respublik*. Moscow.
- Beliaev, V. M. (1962), *Central Asian Music*, ed. and annotated by Mark Slobin, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Connecticut.
- Beliaev, V. M. (1962), *Očerski po istorii muzyki narodov SSSR*, Moscow, 1962 .
- Dušaniev, K. - Luzanova, E. (1999), *Kirgizskoe narodnoe muzikalnoe tvorčestvo*, Biškeek .
- Emsheimer, E. (1943), *Musikethnographische Bibliographie der nicht-slavisches Volker in Russland. Mta Musicologica XV*.
- Gippiysa, E. V. (1981). *Narodnye pesni i instrumental'nye naigryši Adygov*. Tom 2 (1981), Tom 3 – Čast' 1 (1986). Tom 3 – Čast' 2 (1990), Moskva.
- Gippius, E. (1964), Introduction to Akseмов (1964).
- Golden, P. B. (1992), *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic peoples*, Otto Harrassowitz-Wiesbaden.
- Lach, R. (1952), *Volksgesänge von Völkern Russlands. II. Bd. Turktatarische Völker*, Wien.
- Sinor, D. (1979-1980), Samoyed and Ugric Elements in Old Turkic. *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 3-4, pp. 768-773
- Slobin, M. (1969), *Kirgiz instrumental music*. New York: Society for Asian Music.
- Slobin, M. (1969b), *Instrumental Music in Northern Afghanistan*. PhD. dissertation, University of Michigan, UM 7014644.
- Slobin, M. (2005), Zentralasien, In *Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Personen*. Vol. 14. Kassel, Basel: Bärenreiter; Stuttgart, Weimar: Metzler: 775.

Sultanov, T. I. (1982), *Kočevye plemena Priaral'ja v XV-XVII vv : Voprosy etničeskoj i social'noj istorii*. Moskva, Nauka, 1982, pp. 7-8.

Vinogradov, V. S. (1958), *Kirgizskaia narodnaia muzyka*. Frunze: Kirgiz Gos. izdat.

Waterman, R. et al. (1950), *Bibliography of Asiatic Musics*, Thirteenth Installment. Notes of the Music Library Association VIII: 100-18.

For detailed Kirghiz bibliography, see that in Beliaev, V. M. (1939, 1952, 1954, 1962), Duşaliev, K. and Luzanova, E. (1999: 238-245), Emsheimer (1943: 34-63), Slobin (1969a, 2005), Waterman, R. et al. (1950: 100-18) and Lach (1952)